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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Haven Health Department Observes National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, October 25 – 31

NEW HAVEN, Conn. – Today, New Haven Mayor Justin Elicker and New Haven Public Health Director Maritza Bond reminded residents, especially parents, that October 25-31, 2020 is National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week. The week is designated to raise awareness about the dangers of lead exposure and poisoning, and educate parents on reducing lead exposure at home, and the importance of having children tested to prevent serious health effects.

A joint initiative of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the goal of National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week is to encourage local communities to organize events that empower families and other stakeholders to take action. New Haven had the highest rate of children with elevated blood lead levels in Connecticut, according to 2017 surveillance data from the CDC. Connecticut law requires children to have two blood lead tests before their third birthday, but only 57 percent of children in New Haven have been tested.

"This is an acute problem here in New Haven, so we have made raising awareness about the dangers of lead exposure, the importance of testing, and lead abatement a priority," said Mayor Justin Elicker. "Lead poisoning is an entirely preventable public health risk, and I want to thank City Health Director Maritza Bond and her team for tackling the problem head-on with a variety of programs."

About 3.6 million American households with children under six years old live in homes with lead exposure hazards. About 500,000 children in the U.S. between the ages of one and five have blood lead levels greater than or equal to the blood reference value at which the CDC recommends public health actions. In New Haven, 290 children had blood lead levels at or above the CDC reference value of five or more micrograms per deciliter. Early detection of lead in the blood can lower a child's risk for having long term health effects from exposure to lead.

"With the help of a \$5.6 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, we mounted a strong abatement effort in 2019 that helped local low-income property owners cover the cost of abatement," Bond said. "That resulted in lead abatement of 37 housing units last year. The funding also helped pay for 27 lead inspections, 15 educational outreach events, and other activities that engaged some 15,000 residents."

Lead can be found inside and outside the home. Sources include lead water pipes or the soil around the house. The most common source of exposure, however, is the lead-based paint used in many homes built before

1978. Adults and children can ingest lead dust, especially during renovations, repairs, or painting, by swallowing lead dust that settles in food, food preparation areas, floors, window-sills, and other surfaces or eating paint chips soil containing lead.

Children can also be exposed to lead dust through adults' jobs and hobbies and from some metal toys or toys painted with lead-based paint. Children are not exposed equally to lead, nor do they suffer its consequences in the same way. Minority and low-income families and communities are at greater risk of exposure and are disproportionately affected.

Parents can protect their children from childhood lead poisoning by regularly cleaning the home, washing their child's hands and toys often, maintaining the property to prevent paint from flaking, and, most importantly, having children tested twice for blood lead tests before their third birthday. For more information about how to prevent childhood lead poisoning, please visit <https://www.newhavenlead.com/>.

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